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ABSTRACT

Over many years, Kenneth Burke developed theoretical, philosophical, and methodological insights about humans and language. The term he gave to entitle this vast body of work is Dramatism. Rather than the spirit-matter dualism, Burke proposes that scholars direct their attention toward action and motion. By holding that there can be "no action without motion," Burke maintains that no matter what humans do (action), there is always a physiological (motion/material) element involved. The implications of action as a privileged term can be seen in discussions of Burkeian limits and extensions. James Chesebro argues that Burkeian theory has a monocentric bias. However, Burke's statement that "there can be no action without motion" suggests that Dramatism is based on a polarity or continuum rather than a monocentric principle. While Burke certainly did have a strong logocentric bias, texts were not the entire picture for him. In "The Philosophy of Literary Form," he indicates that he engages in three distinct kinds of observation: the intrinsic level of the individual poem; the body of poetry where different works are compared to one another; and the extrinsic level where information about the poet and context is taken into account. Finally, criticism of Burke as ethnocentric or sexist are of considerable importance. Scholars need to develop a better understanding of the impact multiple cultures have on meanings and communication theory. (Includes 23 notes.) (TB)

Jon Radwan's

paper entitled

"EXTENDING BURKE"

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Over the past few years, a conversation regarding limits of the Burkean system has been evolving within our discipline.[1] Despite any limitations, Burke has come to be a central figure on our scene and is now virtually unavoidable in many curricula. An exchange of views on the directions Burkean theory and criticism should take is thus of the utmost importance. I feel that I have "caught the tenor" of this discussion, and have decided to "put in my oar."[2] Specifically, I propose an alternate interpretation of the key term "upon which Burkeanism is built"[3] and then address four of the key issues that have emerged in this colloquy - Monocentrism, Logocentrism, Diversity, and Methodology.

Substance as Action

In a recent QJS essay, Celeste Condit has asserted that "in the Burkean corpus, substance is the key term" (1992, 349). In her view, Burke dialectically transcends the traditional dualism of "spirit" and "matter," embracing them both with his term "substance." While I think that she is completely justified in calling attention to Burke's oft neglected "materialism" (355), I disagree with her placement of substance as Burke's ultimate term. My interpretation of Burke and his work considers action as a center from which the rest of his concepts can be seen to radiate.

Over many years, Kenneth Burke developed theoretical, philosophical, and methodological insights about humans and language. The term he gave to entitle this vast body of work

is Dramatism.[4] In summing up his approach with this term, Burke makes his concerns clear. "And for this terministic perspective we have proposed the trade name of 'Dramatism' precisely because we would feature the term 'act'" (LASA, 366). Rather than the spirit-matter dualism, Burke proposes we direct our attention toward action and motion. This is where his materialism comes in. By holding that there can be "no action without motion" (366), Burke reminds us that no matter what humans do (action), there is always a physiological (motion/material) element involved, even if it is only the synaptic firings of one's brain.

Another slant on this problem can be supplied by a closer look at substance. In A Rhetoric of Motives,[5] Burke addresses the "ambiguities of substance" (21). These ambiguities arise because, despite the fact that we have physically distinct material bodies, we also have some interests and motivations (and certainly physical functions) in common and are thus "substantially one" with others. However, our individual substance is definitely not static. Burke offers Identification as a label for the process whereby an individual can "make A 'consubstantial' with B" (21). While identifying or establishing common substance is itself an act (a making), the concept goes deeper. Substance, although it has material aspects, is essentially a term for action. "For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial" (21).

Thus I consider action as a (if not the) central (albeit polar) term for Burke. In order to be able to talk (or even think) about substance, we must act. While motion and materialism are certainly important and necessary aspects of being human for him, action and realism better represent an author who suggested that "things are the signs of words" (LASA, 361). Accordingly, the implications of action as privileged term can be seen as issues in the discussion of Burkean limits and extensions.

Limitations/Directions

Bernard L. Brock initiated re-assessments of Dramatism in QJS by posing the question "Are there limits to the Burkean System?"[6] Of course there are! I'm not sure who suggested that there were not, but Burke himself notes the limitations inherent in any "descriptive" set of words. In the preface to Language As Symbolic Action he introduces his project by stating "I take it for granted that any selection of terms used for explanatory purposes is, in effect, a 'point of view'" (vii). In short, we may begin to see Dramatism as one "terministic screen" among many -- "directing" attention toward particular phenomena and away from others. Dramatism holds that whenever we act using language, we give brief names to complex situations. All that we consider relevant (or at least noticeable) about things, people, and relationships is indicated through our own personal choice of terms. This conviction led Burke to posit that "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality,

by it's very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" (45).

After recognizing that nobody, not even Burke, can speak with the conviction provided by direct access to reality, different questions present themselves. Accepting the necessity of Burkean limitations, I am prompted to consider three queries about them -- What are they? Is this something I want to change? If so, how?

Answers to the first question have been proposed by Chesebro and include issues of Monocentricity, Logocentricity, Diversity, and Methodology (1992, 1994). The second is of central importance, for if we all have to be biased anyway, one might ask oneself "Which of Burke's biases can I identify with and which seem odious?"[7] In the third question, one must ask about those biases that do not seem congruent, determining how they can be adapted or if they must be discarded and replaced.

Monocentrism

In his essay "Extensions of the Burkeian System" (1992), Chesebro argues that Burkean theory has a monocentric bias. He concludes "Burke's quest has been to generalize, to account for all variations in human communication with one critical scheme and to posit one universal system to explain why and how people are able to communicate with one another and to understand one another" (358). Tompkins and Cheney disagreed with this assessment a year later (1993), noting the centrality

of dualisms in Burke, such as "symbolic/nonsymbolic" and "action/motion."

While it is evident that Burke did propose one universal theory,[8] the question revolves around whether the fundamental principle of this theory is monistic or dualistic. Chesebro claims that it is monistic, considering only symbolic action in the study of human motivation. "In Burke's view, nonsymbolic forms of human motivation are treated as motion which necessarily falls outside of the domain of symbolic action" (1994, 84).

It may appear that I would agree with Chesebro's interpretation given my reading of substance as action. However, when we recall that "there can be no action without motion"[9] both are seen as necessary parts of any human effort. Burke's point in "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action" is not to argue that the two are "unbridgable,"[10] but to establish action and motion as "the basic polarity" (809). As symbol using animals, all of our motivations derive either from our animality or symbolicity (LASA, 6). Our symbol use may set humans apart, but we are still living in a physical and temporal world. As Burke puts it

> Our attitudes toward past or future (remembrances or expectations) are products of our symbolicity. But their behavioral counterparts in the realm of physiological motion must be in the immediate present. For the only way a body can possibly behave is from one present moment to the next (NM/SA, 819).

In keeping with this line of reasoning, the single philosophy called Dramatism is based on a polarity or continuum rather than a monocentric principle. Dramatism, as a point of view, is limited because it privileges this dualism instead

of others. Now, we need not apply Burke all of the time, but when we do one must ask oneself "is the action/motion polarity bias one that I can proceed with comfortably and usefully?" The answer depends largely upon critic and artifact, and apparently many would say yes. There are however, nearly as many others who would not. Although not monocentric, Dramatism has a duocentric bias which is justifiably considered unproductive and restrictive by some. In suggesting a direction for extensions of the Burkean system in this area I would ask "What would a polycentric perspective on language and human action look like?"

Logocentrism

Chesebro draws on postmodern author Jacques Derrida to call attention to Burke's logocentric bias. He is concerned about Burke's logological method ("words about words")[11] because it considers "the spoken and written word [as] literally independent and self-motivating actions" (1992, 359). More specifically, Chesebro (and Derrida) posit that "word-centered" thinking

> [1] deflects attention from a functional analysis of language in societal contexts (i.e. a critic's understandings substitute for actual audience-effects analyses), [2] de-emphasizes the fact that the communication systems themselves are controlled by the privileged who determine which symbols become part of the public domain (i.e. the power, wealth, and ideology of a few - an oligarchy - determine what can become public communication), and [3] inappropriately treats symbol-using itself as a self contained, comprehensive, necessary and sufficient knowledge system (1994, 86).

The first argument appears to target many types of

rhetorical criticism itself. This is not the place to debate the relative value of subjective as opposed to objective methods (or intrinsic vs. extrinsic levels of analysis). Much of the discipline stands guilty as charged on this count. In fact, many rhetoricians I have spoken with are logocentric. I will only say that the rhetorical critic is also an audience, simply an odd one that has the interest and time to try and take a good look at the effect that someone's language use has on their understanding.

Oligarchic control of communication systems rings especially true to me. With the second charge, we are reminded of the many who are silenced, especially in today's media driven world. If the powers that be control the words, perhaps rhetorical critics should turn toward other artifacts and modes of interaction. This move has already been made by many,[12] and Burke himself points to other modalities of symbol use, specifically noting dance, sculpture, painting, and music (LASA, 61).

Even recognizing a bias toward privileged language, I don't think we can stop writing words about words. Humans really do talk an awful lot, and we should keep paying attention, if only to keep an eye on those that are in power. But when directing our attention toward other symbol systems we need to ask ourselves "To what extent do Burkean rhetorical principles that were developed to deal with language apply?" Language is certainly not the paradigm case for all symbol use, but there should be some overlap.

One Burkean principle that I do feel is particularly applicable to non-linguistic human action is form, for where there is content there is form. In Counter-Statement, Burke defines form as "the psychology of the audience, since it involves desires and their appeasements."[13] He goes on to suggest three "principles of classical form", noting typical ways in which acts can appeal based purely on their organization. I have found progressive, repetitive, and conventional forms extremely useful when considering music,[14] but investigation into the distinctly non-discursive forms of dance, architecture, and other plastic arts may serve to be a useful extension of the Burkean system. Rhetoricians have a good deal of experience with audiences and may be able to contribute to an inter-disciplinary understanding of symbolic action even when language is not involved.

The third and final aspect of a logocentric bias involves epistemological issues. Chesebro states that print is "a highly selective way of knowing" and that logocentricity does not venture outside of it. "In all, human knowledge is literally and solely contained within the texts they have created" (1992, 361). This assessment, though it seems true on the face of it, has many problems. First, much depends upon one's definition of text. If we broaden it from the written word to include all "human products" (as was suggested above), the logocentric charge loses some of its bite. Text also implies a material artifact, and perhaps this is an area that could use improvement. Artifacts are often objects of criticism because they are usually

stable, unitary, and isolatable from context -- in short, they are easy to work with. Alternatively, critics may gain valuable insight into humanity by considering exactly those things that are not material and static such as patterns of interaction, self-concepts, and macro-contexts.

In addition, while Burke certainly did have a strong logocentric bias, texts were not the entire picture for him. In The Philosophy of Literary Form, he indicates that he engages in "three distinct kinds of observation"; the "intrinsic" level of the individual poem, the "body of poetry" where different works are compared to one another, and an "extrinsic" level where information about the poet and context is taken into account (x). This final level seems to be what Chesebro and Derrida would like to see. Burke recognizes the importance of non-textual objects/resources of criticism and informs us that "The main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that there is to use" (23). Debate may arise around exactly what is "available" to a critic, but a quotation such as this seems to imply that there is "knowledge" to be found outside of written texts.

Logentricity is a bias that is not appropriate or useful in many contexts. It may be difficult for Burkeans within a discipline whose national organization is the Speech Communication Association to change, but the charge cannot be ignored. Especially with the case of non-discursive phenomena, rhetoricians need to develop insight into how other symbol systems work. I suspect there will be several parallels with

language, but a greater number of divergences.

Diversity

Under the head of the diversity issue, I include both Chesebro's concern with ethnocentrism (1992, 361-2; 1994, 86-7) and Condit's focus on gender (1992, 1994). Chesebro notes that Burke and his theories are necessarily products of his culture (1994, 87) and therefore the "essential question turns on what happens to our understanding of the communication process when culture - and specifically multiple cultures - is recognized as a significant factor determining meaning" (86). It is a very good question, one that could prove even more telling if we ask it again, replacing culture and multiple cultures with gender and multiple genders. Ethnocentric and phallocentric biases are obviously limiting and do not seem to lead to charitable or useful acts. I will address culture first, and then gender.

A Burkean concept that seems applicable to cultural issues is "frames of acceptance." In Attitudes Toward History[15], Burke defines them as "the more or less organized system of meaning by which a thinking [hu]man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it" (5). Because we live "moment to moment," roles and attitudes must be realized through our actions. This means that frames of acceptance ultimately involve courses of action, telling one in effect "do do this."[16] Here are some things we could add to a Burkean "do do" list in order to broaden its frame of acceptance to include

multicultural meanings.

- Examine rhetorical action that happens in languages other than English. Many of them don't have letters! With non-western languages especially, Burkean concepts such as "Joycing" and "ablaut punning"[17] may need serious revision.
- Develop different standards of judgment and points of reference arising out of or "in tune" with the culture at issue or multiculturalism in general.

With directions such as these, we may begin to develop a better understanding of the impact multiple cultures have on meanings and communication theory. Condit's identification of the Burkean gender bias is of equal (if not greater) import. Although many of the cultural directions above could be easily adapted to become gender issues, she identifies problems with Dramatism at a more fundamental level. She believes that Burke's "Definition of Man" is only a partial representation of humanity that "overemphasized the negative and hierarchy," (1994, 80) and offers her own definition.

> People are
> players with symbols
> inventors of the negative and the possibility of morality
> grown from their natural condition by tools of their collective making
> trapped between hierarchy and equality (moved constantly to reorder)
> neither rotten nor perfect, but now and again lunging down both paths (1992, 352).

I find this definition far superior to Burke's, especially the image of symbolic action as play. However, there are a few modifications I would make. First, Condit left out the animality

and material aspect that she was arguing for with her interpretation of substance. Thus, the first line of her definition might read "The animals called people are" instead.

That was the easy one. Other modifications need more support. Clause four follows Burke in placing a possessive pronoun prior to "natural condition" (LASA, 13, 16). This would seem to imply that symbol-use does not come naturally to human beings, that at one time some animal definable as a "person" did not use language. This is a difficult position to maintain. Just two lines before we stipulated that playing with symbols is a defining (natural) characteristic. Because of our symbolicity, there is a certain sense that the natural world of motion and sheer animality can never be fully "ours." To avoid contradiction, I would amend clause four to "grown from the natural condition and their animality by tools of their collective making."

Condit's fifth clause involves hierarchy, equality, and re-ordering. When presenting his original, Burke writes "Goaded by the spirit of hierarchy. But if that sounds too weighted, we could settle for, 'Moved by a sense of order'" (LASA, 15). Frankly, the former phrasing does sound too weighted,[18] so I will deal with the latter. Order, hierarchy, and equality are all terms for types of relationships and can be boiled down into two basic elements, association and dissociation (49-50). Goaded and moved are terms for motivation. Accordingly, we should examine this issue to see what sort of motives arise from our sense of relationships.

In Permanence and Change, Burke takes one of his most direct approaches to motives. He states that "motives are subdivisions in a larger frame of meaning."[19] This larger frame (of acceptance) is referred to as an "orientation" - a sense of relationships and serviceability regarding how one should operate in the world (18-20). Not surprisingly (given logocentrism), Burke claims that we are motivated by our terms.[20] Not only do terms direct our senses toward some phenomena and not others, but many sensory "'observations' are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made" (LASA, 46). Simply put, if one believes that there has been a "shooting," one is cued or led to look for (observe) the shooter and the shootee (at the very least). Therefore, my re-wording of this clause might be "Associating and dissociating, acting on the implications thereof."

Burke's final "wry codicil" reads "and rotten with perfection" (LASA, 16). Rotten refers to "central" role Burke gives the principle of perfection in the motivations of symbol-using animals (16, 18). Perfection arises from the possibility of abstraction provided by language. To explain it, Burke incorporates Aristotelian entelechy, where symbols imply a telos or end. "'Perfection' means literally a finishedness. The 'perfect' is the completely done" (26). With this sort of approach, a fundamental dilemma or paradox becomes evident. The problem is, humans live in a temporal world, unfolding moment to moment. Nothing can ever be completely done, because time isn't up yet! Our symbolicity

permeates our very being, convincing us that we can actually come up with "the perfect word" to describe something that is necessarily in flux. All we are actually doing is momentarily fixing a meaning with terms that have a wide variety of individual associations and a limited overlap with the associations of others. For instance, right now I am attempting to use the "perfect" words to describe Burke.

Issues of definition arise from this point, for "the perfect word" is in an important sense synonymous with "the perfect definition." Burke identifies two types of definition, descriptive and normative (LASA, 20). Descriptive definitions take a naming or scientistic approach, decreeing "is" or "is not." Surprisingly, Burke's definition is of this type.[21] Normative definitions take a dramatistic approach and recognize the rhetorical (hortatory) nature of language.[22] To round this section out, a definition of people which begins to take multiple genders, multiculturalism, and dramatism into account might read

> If you would like the rest of us talking animals to call
> you a person, you should be
> playing with symbols
> re-inventing[23] the negative and the possibility of morality
> growing from the natural condition and your animality
> through tools of our collective making
> associating and dissociating, acting on the implications
> thereof
> and always positing finishedness where there can be none.

This definition is not nearly as elegant as Burke's or even Condit's, but I hope it succeeds in pointing out some directions Burkean theory can take to fit a changing scene.

Methodology

Finally, Chesebro identifies a methodological bias in Burkeanism (1992, 1994). In summing up his position he states

> "Burke's pentad of terms" for "analyzing motives appear almost universal, readily applied to any situation," and [ ] that "a 'stripped down' listing of Burkean concepts" employed "as a pre-fabricated 'cookie cutter' for any and all criticism" may spell the destruction of the Burkeian system, much as Black argued of the neo-Aristotelian system in 1965 (1994, 87).

He is right about the dangers involved with Burke's writing, especially when he goes on to warn against "religious advocates of dramatism." However, if there is one thing I hope we have learned from our disciplinary heritage, it is that you cannot condemn a tool because it has been put to ignoble uses. In many ways, the unfortunate consequences of bureaucratizing the Burkean imaginative are unavoidable. But on the bright side, for every critic with a cookie cutter approach, there is another who has given serious thought to choosing a method and is truly interested in what the full implications of a method (and corresponding theoretical orientation) can highlight about a given artifact.

The problem with neo-Aristotelianism, apart from base practitioners, was that it was <u>the</u> perspective within our discipline. Black called attention to the critical monopoly Aristotelian concepts had, and called for the development of new methods. Neo-Aristotelianism was not "destroyed," it was simply edged into its proper place as one perspective among many. We have learned our lesson, and I am confident that Burkeanism will not become the mode of choice for <u>all</u> rhetorical

critics. Only by employing a variety of critical perspectives can we begin to reach the level of understanding that multi-methodological triangulation can provide. Burkeanism is a perspective available to rhetorical critics. Only by applying a variety of approaches to rhetorical phenomena can we begin to "use all that there is to use."

Conclusion

Extensions of Burkeanism are an obvious necessity. We cannot let a theoretical system with such rich potential become a closed feedback loop. In this essay I have suggested that we need to explore several avenues in the future. They include development of a polycentric conception of symbolic action, an exploration of non-linguistic symbol use, an appreciation of diversity, and a multiplicity of methodologies.

Endnotes

[1]In addition to convention panels, several views in the discussion have been put into print. A recent volume is

James Chesebro, ed., Extensions of the Burkeian System (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

In this paper I primarily address five recent articles in the Quarterly Journal of Speech. They are

James Chesebro, "Extensions of the Burkean System," QJS, 78 (1992): 356-368.

--- "Extending the Burkeian System: A Response to Tompkins and Cheney," QJS, 80 (1994): 83-90.

Celeste Condit, "Post-Burke: Transcending the Sub-stance of Dramatism," QJS, 78 (1992): 349-355.

--- "Framing Kenneth Burke: Sad Tragedy or Comic Dance?" QJS, 80 (1994): 77-82.

Philip Tompkins and George Cheney, "On the Limits and Sub-stance of Kenneth Burke and his Critics," QJS, 79 (1993): 225-231.

They will be cited hereafter by author and year.

[2]Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press); cited hereafter as POLF.

[3]Condit, 1992.

[4]Kenneth Burke, Language As Symbolic Action (Berkeley:

University of California Press, 1966); hereafter cited as LASA. "The term for the lot, as one will be reminded often, is 'Dramatism.'" p. vii.

[5]Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969,) p. 21; hereafter cited as ROM.

[6]Bernard Brock, "Burke, Revisited and Reviewed: The Limits of the Burkeian System," QJS 78 (1992) p. 347.

[7]Chesebro addresses this issue in terms of utility. While the ultimate value of a method does have a great deal to do with how useful it is found to be, I prefer thinking about it in terms of identification. Biases lead to actions. A "good" bias is one that you are comfortable acting upon.

[8]See Chesebro, 1994 p. 85.

[9]Burke, LASA, p. 366. See also Kenneth Burke, "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action," Critical Inquiry 4 (1978) 809-838; pp. 811, 814. Hereafter cited as "NM/SA."

[10]Chesebro, "Extending," p. 89; Burke, "NM/SA," pp. 811, 815.

[11]Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) p. 1.

[12]Many others hold this position. A book I especially like is Barry Brummett, Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture (Huntsville: University of Alabama Press, 1991.) See p. 38.

[13]Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.) Hereafter CS.

[14]Burke uses frequent musical examples in CS. See Bostdorff and Tompkins, "Musical Form and Rhetorical Form: Kenneth Burke's 'Dial' Reviews as Counterpart to 'Counter-Statement,'" Pre/Text, 6 (1985) 235-252. Burke's three types of form are insightful but ethnocentric. Non-western forms must be explored.

[15]Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of Califrnia Press, 1984); hereafter cited as ATH

[16]Burke ends up equating rejection and acceptance because the "strategy" for "don't do that" equals "do do this." See ATH, p. 22.

[17]Burke, POLF, p. 57. See pp. 369-378 also.

[18]I am completely willing to abandon hierarchy as the characteristic form of order. Hierarchy is only one possibility, and it has unfortunately achieved dominance in many cultures. I prefer to think of order in terms of a pattern or web.

[19]Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p. 19; hereafter cited as P&C.

[20]Among other things, such as our animality.

[21]On LASA p. 20 Burke indicates that although his definition is scientistic, it is still "admonitory." Why not be up front and present a definition that includes "should?"

[22]See Richard Weaver, Language Is Sermonic, ed. Richard Johannesen et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970).

[23]Re-inventing in the sense that each time we use language it is a new individuation of the negative principle in a new moment.